

Never the Nightingale

By Daniel Whitehead Hicky



Illustrations by Athos Menaboni

NEVER THE NIGHTINGALE

by DANIEL WHITEHEAD HICKY

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ATHOS MENABONI

WRITING of Daniel Whitehead Hicky's position among the leading poets, Joseph Auslander stated, "Mr. Hicky is a fitting successor to Sidney Lanier, bright star whose glory is less than only that of Edgar Allan Poe in all the southern galaxy."

NEVER THE NIGHTINGALE is Mr. Hicky's first volume to appear since 1940, and contains about fifty poems typical of his finest work. The Georgia coastline, the fabulous ports of the old world, an orchard in the spring, a soldier's letter from the front — each furnishes a deep inspiration for this poet.

"Here is a real poet," commented Pulitzer Prize Winner Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings. "Mr. Hicky's poems, strangely satisfying, achieve that most difficult task of making the intangible, tangible."

And Archibald Rutledge, famed southern poet, says, "No living poet can match Mr. Hicky's magical qualities. His insight is poignant and infallible, his gift so rich, the touch so wild yet unerring. These poems are pure genius."

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Books by

DANIEL WHITEHEAD HICKY

NEVER THE NIGHTINGALE

WILD HERON

CALL BACK THE SPRING

THIRTEEN SONNETS OF GEORGIA

BRIGHT HARBOR

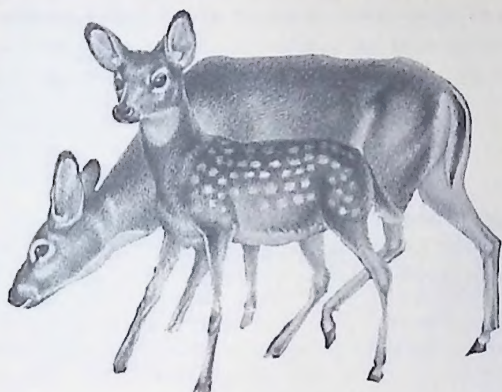


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DANIEL WHITEHEAD HICKY



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TUPPER AND LOVE INC. *Atlanta*



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DANIEL WHITEHEAD HICKY

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The American Mercury for "Sunset: Marsh Country".
The Saturday Review of Literature for "Island Fishermen: St. Simon's", "Orchard Skies", "Georgia Summer", "At the Symphony", "Savannah Waterfront", "I Have a Need of Gulls", and "August Garden: Key West".

The Saturday Evening Post for "Nocturne: Georgia Coast", "December Night", "The Trees Must Go", "The Return", "A Letter from the Front", "Child Watching a Snail", and "Dawn Fishermen: Key West". *The Ladies' Home Journal* for "Never the Nightingale", "The Day You Die", "Summer Shall Come Again", "The Children in Autumn", and "Portrait in Sunlight".

Cosmopolitan Magazine for "Harbor Night", "Retired Sea Captain", "Hyacinths", and "So Small a Day". *Good Housekeeping* for "Summertime Hill", "Winter Night", and "Daisies". *Harper's Bazaar* "For a Battlefield"; *The Farm Journal* for "Snowscape with Figures"; and the *Georgia Review* for "Iris Are Not For Children", "Georgia Towns", and "The Trout Stream".

The *New York Times* for "Snowfall After Dark", "Land of the Wild Scrub Pine", "Woods in Winter", "October Evening", "The Skier", "The Whistling Swans", "The Secret", "The River Boats", and "Orchard in Autumn".

Contents

<i>Never the Nightingale</i>	1
<i>Nocturne: Georgia Coast</i>	2
<i>Orchard Skies</i>	3
<i>At the Symphony</i>	4
<i>The Day You Die</i>	5
<i>Island Fishermen: St. Simon's</i>	6
<i>The Trees Must Go</i>	7
<i>Harbor Night</i>	8
<i>Summer Shall Come Again</i>	9
<i>Savannah Waterfront</i>	10
<i>Snowfall After Dark</i>	11
<i>The Trout Stream</i>	12
<i>Daisies</i>	14
<i>I Have a Need of Gulls</i>	15
<i>Georgia Summer</i>	16
<i>Woods in Winter</i>	17
<i>Dawn Fishermen: Key West</i>	18
<i>August Garden: Key West</i>	19
<i>So Late the Darkness</i>	20
<i>Land of the Wild Scrub Pine</i>	22
<i>Summertime Hill</i>	23
<i>Wood Ibis by Moonlight</i>	24
<i>December Night</i>	25
<i>Iris Are Not for Children</i>	26
<i>Home Town</i>	27
<i>Deer at the Edge of Dawn</i>	28

<i>Retired Sea Captain</i>	29
<i>Snowscape with Figures</i>	30
<i>A Letter from the Front</i>	31
<i>Beauty</i>	32
<i>October Evening</i>	33
<i>A Snow So Wide</i>	34
<i>The Whistling Swans</i>	36
<i>The Secret</i>	37
<i>For a Battlefield</i>	38
<i>Wanderer's Return</i>	39
<i>Moment of Yellow Light</i>	40
<i>The River Boats</i>	41
<i>Child Watching a Snail</i>	43
<i>The Skier</i>	44
<i>The Children in Autumn</i>	45
<i>The Return</i>	46
<i>Snow Hill at Sunset</i>	47
<i>Hyacinths</i>	48
<i>Marsh Lilies</i>	49
<i>So Small a Day</i>	50
<i>Portrait in Sunlight</i>	51
<i>Orchard in Autumn</i>	52
<i>Winter Night</i>	53
<i>How Like the Wind</i>	54
<i>Street Scene</i>	55
<i>Autumn Pastoral</i>	57
<i>Georgia Towns</i>	58
<i>The Blowing of Leaves</i>	60
<i>Sunset: Marsh Country</i>	61
<i>Taormina, Revisited</i>	62

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Never the Nightingale

NEVER the nightingale shall haunt this marsh
Where the gray herons and the white,
Feathered with moonlight, ride the secret reaches
Of the night.
Never the heartbreak of the nightingale
Shall halt this salty wind—
Only the herons crying, always crying
Brief music pale and thinned,
Shall fly, triumphant, over the making tides
White and clear
When the slow darkness nibbles at the grasses
Like a young deer.

My heart is long attuned to this wild crying,
The loneliness that stretches like a wave
Where the gray oaks count out the centuries.
I am not brave
Enough to bear a greater burden of beauty
Than these salt marshes bring;
For other men, if there be lovelier lands,
Let nightingales sing.

Nocturne: Georgia Coast

THE shrimping boats are late today;
The dusk has caught them cold.
Swift darkness gathers up the sun,
And all the beckoning gold
That guides them safely into port
Is lost beneath the tide.
Now the lean moon swings overhead,
And Venus, salty-eyed.

They will be late an hour or more,
The fishermen, blaming dark's
Swift mischief or the stubborn sea,
But as their lanterns' sparks
Ride shoreward at the foam's white rim,
Until they reach the pier
I cannot say if their catch is shrimp,
Or fireflies burning clear.

Orchard Skies

I HAVE known skies where Egypt's burning sands
Gave back more bronze and heat than sunset gave,
From tall Sicilian cliffs watched night's dark hands
Plunge a young moon into the sea's wide grave,
And from the shore of China when desire
Had caught and doomed me like a prisoner,
Watched the slow east burst suddenly into fire
Lighting the day with red and lavender.
These were great skies that I could not behold
More than a miserly moment before they had fled,
But when my orchards shake off winter's cold
I can reach up and touch them where they spread
Bright heavens trembling petal-pale and proud,
And break a bough, and keep it, like a cloud.

At the Symphony

HOLD now my hand in yours as the baton trembles and
 rises,

As it carves the motionless air, releasing a river of notes
Rushing headlong across the reaches of darkness,
Exploding like flowers of light in our ears, in our throats.

Hold my hand closely, as though you were holding the
 autumn's first leaf,

Warming the cup of your hand with its earliest veins of fire;
Let us not whisper our praise, nor turn toward the eyes of
 each other,

But over the ripened meadows of memory and desire

Let us run like children again on feet that challenge the wind,
Count off the petals of daisies and spread them out in the sun,
Single out a blackberry thicket and taste of its wine's hushed
 purple,

Lie down in the grasses of peace till the long green hour is done.

Let us capture this moment completely; call it securely our own,
Flung back into Time, into childhood, walking in sunlight again;
Then when the river of music has spent its last bright torrent,
Bowed with our years, let us go out to the blinding night and
 the rain.

The Day You Die

THE day you die I will not come and say:
Poor weary dust, how rested now, at peace,
Nor shed a tear upon that bitter day
Above the new turned earth granting you release.
I will go seeking all you were and find
Dark eyes that I remember where larkspurs blow,
And, listening, pluck your voice from the warm wind
As clearly as a red rose from the snow.
Granite can never capture nor hold you fast;
Forever at my side your steps shall be,
Tracing the paths we knew and loved the best,
And searching restless patterns of the sea
I will find your face in all the tides that run,
Your laughter, defiant, lifting toward the sun.

Island Fishermen: St. Simon's

WITH sunset now and ripening of the tide,
The day's bright catch a thing for memory,
Fishermen bronze as nets the sun has dried
Turn to a smaller doorway than the sea,
Taking the dim streets in a motley crowd,
Their salty words and laughter lifting higher,
Leaving the gulls behind them in a cloud,
The small boats rocking, arguing with the pier.
Deserted and forgotten now with night
The boats grow lonely like old fishermen,
Knowing no voice, no flare of cigarette
To break the darkness settling warm and plain,
Only the echo of a wave's far roar,
A pale wind breathing silver to the shore.

The Trees Must Go

THE trees must go, they said, to bring a view
Of distant mountains to the hilltop's brow.
First one by one they fell, then two by two.
Though that was years ago, I see them now
Swaying against a startled patch of sky,
In long green sighs going down upon the earth,
Shaking the sunlight from their leaves, the cry
Of sparrows that woke the morning with their mirth.
The view is nice, they say; it reaches clear
Across the valley and brings the mountains near
And the young breath of spring lifts cool and clean.
But when I look beyond the hilltop there,
I see a million leaves that might have been,
And hear their little thunder, warm and green.

Harbor Night

EVEN the gulls grow tired when day is ending
And the young stevedores' last weary cries
Drift over the harbor in forgotten music
And the new tide comes in with quickening sighs.

Eyelids of lanterns like slow fireflies flutter
Along the silent pier, and whippoorwill
From drowsy willow trees across the river
Strike one high note and hold it, stubborn and shrill.

Like an old drunken seaman now the sun
Deserting the harbor pockets his gold and goes
To some far salty tavern beyond the night,
A tavern whose dark address nobody knows.

Summer Shall Come Again

SUMMER shall come again, her slender rose
Lend its bright ruby to the wind's blue hand,
And over meadows where the clover blows
Bronze orchestras of bees awake the land.
Small streams shall speak their music to the sun
And in the green cathedrals of the trees
The robins stare at summer till summer is done
And all her splendor ravel to memories.
Summer shall come again, and in due time,
But in my heart no more her sun will climb
Nor any flower unfold its miracle,
For she is gone whose laughter was a bell,
Whose love made bread and wine of every stone
And kindled stars and moons when there were none.

Savannah Waterfront

LIKE an old stevedore the harbor sleeps,
The ships at anchor and the barges tied.
Beyond the mist, a lone star, curious-eyed,
Watches the hesitant darkness as it creeps
In measured patterns till the marsh is one
With sky and river and, far out, the sea —
Lost now and lonely and no longer free,
But bearing still the memory of sun.
No husky voices rise to break the spell,
No banjo throws a note across the night;
Only the long slow wash of a drowsy river
That fails to wake the throat of a buoy bell,
Says requiem for a day that has ended forever
In yellow periods of lantern light.

Snowfall After Dark

I COULD not tell by sound of wind
Nor sighing of a single flake
Against the pane that all the world
Lay pale with snow in darkness' wake,

And sad am I that I was left
Outside this secret of the night
That turned a thousand blackened boughs
Into a flowering of white.

Since man has little time to learn
Through springtime's doubtful weather
How tireless fingers of the sun
Put apple blooms together,

Had but the wind's voice prompted me,
Or hint of snowflake drifted through,
I could have witnessed in an hour
What April takes a month to do.

The Trout Stream

ON a day that was pink and yellow,
Pink where the laurel grew,
Dragging the stream with its blossoms,
Shaking it off like dew
Where the wind caught up its branches,
On a day that was yellow with sun
Gilding the foam going over
The falls where the speckled trout run,
I stood on the banks for an hour,
My thoughts as cool as the fern
As I saw a fisherman casting,
As I watched him twist and turn
Deep in the rushing of waters
That carried the sun on its way
Over the rocks and past the laurel,
Bursting in golden spray.

"How beautiful here," I whispered
Quite to myself as I stood
At the edge of the stream's wild music
That woke the quiet wood,
"How at peace the cedars and mountains,"
I added to what I had said,
But a shout in the bright waters shook me

And suddenly I turned my head
To see in the warm yellow morning,
Like an arrow suspended in flight,
A trout with a rhythm like music.
Lovely it was in the light
Of a day that was pink and yellow,
A peaceful day I had thought,
And my heart leaped up as I watched it
Fighting the line that had caught
It up and over the falling
Of waters that were its home,
Up from the banks of the laurel,
Over the spending of foam.

Then I turned away from the fern banks
And I took the valley road,
And when the hours had sifted their sands
And weariness heavied my load,
I paused in a cooling patch of shade
And cursed with an honest breath
That a pink and yellow morning
Should know the silver twitch of death.

Daisies

ALWAYS in summertime I wish that I
Might stare astonished as a daisy's eye
That looks on every dawn as though it were
The eastern sky's first lanterned traveler,
And at the sun of noon burning molten-bright,
As though it were the earth's last show of light.

There is no thing on earth but it is new
To any daisy's eye: the fleeting blue
Of butterfly wings, the sudden golden drone
A bee composes over the scented cone
Of clover blossoms; the repeated sight
Of daylight going, and the coming night.
The first crust of a new moon, or the last,
Alerts a daisy's eye and holds it fast.

Always in summertime I wish that I
Might stare astonished as a daisy's eye
At everything I've seen before, and find
A newness and a brightness that would blind
Me to my way of thinking, and hold my tongue.
A daisy's eye might keep an old man young.

I Have a Need of Gulls

I HAVE a need of gulls again and their flying
Over the foam-white acres of the sea
Where the sunrise drifts like a fleet of ships afire,
And the dark like eternity.
I have a need for the yellow sea oat's music
And the single salty note
Curled in the palm of a shell as pale as the sigh
In a sandpiper's throat.

Too long the city has housed me and fed me its fare,
Too long I have run with the crowd;
I have a need to be free again like the gulls,
To bathe my face in the cool white peace of a cloud.
I have a need to lie at length on the sands,
To unshoulder my burdens out where the seagulls cry,
And to all of my heart's dark questions unanswered
Hear the white answers they write in the sky.

Georgia Summer

THIS is the spider lily's slumberous hour,
The gold lantanas' on the broken fence;
The cricket's bronze siesta. The cockscomb flower
Withers and droops in carmine opulence.
Cape jasmines, nodding, shift the last red dust
A wagon made, and whiten once again;
Spreading hot wings, a sparrow eyes the west,
Scorning its broken promises of rain.
A yellow jacket rises now and falls
In failing rhythms where the heat drifts clear
Over a motionless sea of cotton bolls
Ripening on leaves no single wind has stirred.
Red cannas' listless tongues hang on the air,
Speechless, even, for a scarlet word.

Woods in Winter

BARE-BREASTED now and unashamed the wood
Stands cold as stone against the quiet hour.
Small eyes of rabbits, sharp with hunger's search,
Kindle brown grasses where the wind has stood
Half frozen through a night of motionless birch.
The imminence of snow, pale flake on flake,
Locked in a cloud withholds its shining power
Which in a moment's space may stir and break.
Not till the snow is gone, the bladed cold,
Shall I return to these stripped woods again;
Walking through silence here I seem to move
In measured quiet among a thousand men
Lashed by the whips of life, broken and old,
Lonely as all men are bereft of love.

Dawn Fishermen: Key West

SLOWLY, a shadow's length this side of day,
The small boats edge to sea with less of sound
Than the wind takes to lift a cloud of spray.
In salty blackness now the fishing ground
Trembles with ebbing tides that brought with night
Small topaz islands of sargasso grass;
Closer to shore the sea anemones light
Under the breakers as they pause and pass.
Lost now at sea, or almost lost from land,
The boats fan out. The fishermen's nets go down
Against the dawn wind lifting thin and higher,
Then rise again and spread and sink and drown
Till suddenly, as if by one great hand,
They pull the sun up, setting the dark afire.

August Garden: Key West

NEITHER the sea nor gulf have salty words
To speak across the hot and slumberous day;
Even the slow tides under the circling birds
Make small half-hearted patterns and drift away.
Within the high-walled garden dream the flowers:
The red hibiscus with its tight shut eyes,
The bougainvillea drowsing in scarlet showers
Under the copper trellis of the skies.
Above the tall poinsettias the allamanders
Drop golden heads into their emerald leaves,
And where the velvet blossoms of oleanders
Lean heavy on the air a lone bird grieves
Over a parching fountain white as lime.
The sundial's hands lie still, defying Time.

So Late the Darkness

SO LATE, so late the darkness trembled down when we
were younger
And dusk the color of purple and scented like wild sweet
grapes
Drifted across the meadows and over the eaves of the
evening;
So long the daylight lingered and we watched its bright
escapes.

We were children then and our books and our pencils were
waiting
Till we played at run sheep run, red light, and devil may
care;
We called out the scores and we laughed and we hid again
in the hedges
And we prayed to the God of our childhood that still there
was gold in the air.

We are older now, we are wiser; but wisdom can never repay
us
For the light we have lost from our hearts in the day that
closes early;
There is no pause in its going, no pause like the breathing in
music,

The dark comes swiftly now, on the red heels of the sunset
nearly.

And the clock grows ever impatient; it talks with itself on
the wall,

And we rise in the dark from our supper and unsteadily
climb the stairs

To lie in our beds fighting slumber and loneliness, each to
each,

And wonder what power has stolen the lavender light from
our years.

Land of the Wild Scrub Pine

THESE are my acres no man can take from me:
Land of the wild scrub pine and heron's flight,
Islands of purple hyacinths drifting to sea,
Mornings sun-blinded, hours of breathless night
Waiting the tide, like a great lover, to turn
Shoreward again with starlight in its eyes;
This is the land for which I begin to yearn
When I am no farther away than the gull flies.
There is no gold nor silver in the veins
Of this, my land, but beauty journeys deep
In its black soil to light the tangled skeins
Of spider lily blossoms pale as sleep,
And in the eyes of its people, happy and free,
Burns all the slow wisdom of eternity.





Summertime Hill

IT IS summer now, the half-awakened hour for bee and
clover,
For yellow butterflies in the cannas' scarlet throats,
Summer, when still the breath of the shattering lilac lingers
And the slow incense of the moonflower lifts and floats.

He lies asleep, or on the green edges of sleep, this boy
With a dozen small summers behind him, forgot like a prayer,
His cap pulled over his nose to lessen the freckles.
The sun and the sweat of the day have captured his hair.

Far up in the oceans of sky his ships are sailing,
The pale and the lean flotillas of cloud and space;
Beside him a hornet explores the lashes of a daisy's eye,
The wind blows hot through a pattern of Queen Anne's lace.

Still he sleeps away the summer's luxurious hour,
Her secret, sun-bright kiss on his lips as he lies
Silent as the slumbering passions within his veins,
As the blue, unspoken thunder in his eyes.

Wood Ibis by Moonlight

THIS was a cypress swamp by setting sun.
Its waters ran with amber and the hot
Slow molten gold of day's last light. Not one
White wing had ventured to this darkening spot.
But now by moonlight I return and see
The cypress blossoming with the hush of flowers;
Each stump is white as snow, each withered tree.
If I should call out through these lonely hours
A single word would wake the garden here
And all its folded blossoms suddenly
Spread wide their petals and, soaring white and clear,
Give back their full-blown beauty to the sky.

December Night

THROUGH all this frozen night there is no sound
Save my white footsteps on a whiter ground,
No stir up from the meadow, nor the brake
Lost in the whitening wind beyond the lake.

How soft the lamps come on, their sudden gold
Shining from windows warming up the cold;
How pale the trees, how bowed their branches down
With loveliness men cannot see in town.

But hush, and listen! Above this stretch of white,
This swirl of snow that blinds me like a light,
I hear a slow sound plain and high and far,—
The wind's cold fingers polishing a star.

Iris Are Not for Children

IRIS are not for children laughing, playing,
Nor jonquils with their cups of yellow fire.
These colors belong to April and the old
Whose veins no longer blossom with desire,
Whose years are measured out like raindrops dripping
Slower and slower from an April briar.

Leave summer roses to the children's fingers,
The scent of lilies through the August night;
They are concerned with these far more than April
For summer is the season of delight
When meadows ripen and a bluebird's pattern
Shadows a sea of daisies hot and white.

Iris are not for children, nor the jonquils.
On any day in spring you may see the old
Clasping at these first flowers as though they held
The last fragment of April they shall hold,
And in their eyes, somehow, a dream that takes them
Across the street and through the wind and cold.

Home Town

THE town that I am proud to call my own
Is not a lighted city with towers of stone,
No seaport sensuous with the smell of ships.
Yet when the day goes by and darkness slips
Into the hedges and the orchards there,
Of all the world I think my town most fair,
With lamps like casual fireflies in the dark
And lovely as the singing of a lark
The children's voices and the crickets' choir
Lifting toward heaven as the moon lifts higher.
My town lies seldom on a map or chart
Yet bright it twinkles in memory of the heart,
And there I turn, a tired, forgotten man
Deep in the city's blinding, hurrying span,
To claim my peace, my lost identity
Where even the sunflowers' eyes remember me.

Deer at the Edge of Dawn

SURPRISED as though I were the sun
An hour ahead of dawn,
Two small deer drinking at a stream
Looked up, and plunged head on

Into a thicker ledge of leaves
Than I had parted there,
Making green music in the forest.
Through the early air

They leapt in rhythms I could hear
For many acres' space
Until each twig snapped back again,
Each leaf regained its place.

I stood bewildered for a time
Half as frightened as they,
But this I knew: the delicate
Green music of that day

Plunging forward, folding back
In spears of trembling light
Would haunt the forests of my sleep
Many a moonless night.

Retired Sea Captain

WEEP not for him, come home to stare away
The long, slow years that reach beyond the sea,
To add his curious coins of memory,
A Midas from the harbors of his day.
Before the hearthfire he remembers now
Algiers, a million diamonds in the dark,
Proud Istanbul and Athens white as snow,
Liverpool loud with seagull and the lark.
He nods, and beckons, and Calcutta comes
With all the fires of sunrise in its eyes;
The Congo answers with a tide of drums,
Pale China tells him all her mysteries.
Weep not for him. He rides the sea tonight
Before a hearth where threads of slow flames climb,
His compass trembling toward the north star's light,
Safe in the archipelago of Time.

Snowscape with Figures

NO winter-sharpened stars hang in the sky.
This is a night of snowfall and the black
Thick darkness crowding branches of the trees.
No sound awakes the silence but the crack
Of hemlocks where the snow piles white and deep,
And soon their music through the ice-thin air
Drifts into quiet of the frozen shadows
Until another branch breaks suddenly clear.

But there are stars deep in the forest's reaches
Where small and furry and half-frightened things
Search through the crystal night for sustenance,
And stars shine in the branches where trembling wings
Quiet as snowfall fold into the dark.
Through all the woods, down every path I go,
The eyes of hunger kindle in the night
Small, secret stars beneath the falling snow.

A Letter from the Front

THERE is so much to write, so much of death and dying,
So much of anguish in the dark and stricken mind:
Another city fallen, a shattered fort retaken—
I cannot write for burning eyes grown blind.

But tell me, tell me quickly, swift as lightning,
If summer's on the Georgia fields again,
Crepe myrtle thick with pink and sudden crimson,
Their hot and crinkly blossoms steaming in the rain?

Tell me, tell me if the bleeding hearts of melons
Lie secret-like beneath the ribbons of the corn,
If still, O still the crickets wake the starlight,
The Chattahoochee reddens in the land where I was born?

Still does the quiet duskfall purple up the doorway,
The cotton stretch its acres warm and white;
Is there yet one (O eyes, O lips remembered!),
Who turns and reaches for me in the restless night?

I wait your letters as the dark the sunrise;
There is so little I can ever say—
My words have blood, the smell of death upon them;
Yours, moonlight from a world long centuries away.

Beauty

NO MAN has set his foot on any land
But beauty's steps have long preceded him,
Nor climbed a mountain but her steady hand
Has spread a cloud upon its highest rim.
There is no burning desert man has taken
Seeking the bones of men who have gone before,
But to some far oasis his eyes awaken
Discovering her earlier signature.
Always a man must follow, like sparrows' winging,
The wild, clear winds of beauty down the earth,
Find his own song an echo of her singing,
His laughter but a pattern of her mirth;
Find even upon the lips of love each day
The light of dawn that he must kiss away.



October Evening

THE pears hang heavy, gold along the day.
Reluctantly the crisp wind-sharpened leaves
Forsake the quivering boughs and drift away,
Lost in the gathering dusk, the wind that grieves.
Chrysanthemums, once red and yellow lights,
Upon the rustling grass lie frozen, brown;
Slow chimney sparks, fireflies of winter nights,
Blossom in yellow patterns and are done.
The year is waning, guttering like a lamp,
Losing itself in darkness and in time,
One with the tiring wind, the ripened pears.
A late bird, shadow-blinded, fumbling home
Cries loneliness through silence cold and damp;
A whole world answers him, yet no one hears.

A Snow So Wide

WHOSE prints these are across the snow
I cannot say; I do not know.
But journeying this path alone
With silence on the heart like stone,
I hope that I can overtake
Him traveling through wind and flake,
A lonely shadow in a night
So brittle that it snaps with white
Where fir and spruce and alder bend
Beneath the fingers of the wind.

I must catch him if I can
And speak a word or two. No man
Has eyes enough to witness all
This blinding rush of petal-fall—
A snow so deep, a snow so wide
It takes a county in its stride,
Making a heaven where none was
Of cattle lanes and meadow grass—
And tell it clearly, eye to eye,
Without his word being called a lie.

I'll need him in a time or two
To bear me out tonight was true:

The smallest flake knowing where to go,
This music of my feet on snow,
And pines and firs along the way
Shining there as proud as day;
Each cabin white and glittering
As if inside there slept a king.
And overhead, through wind and flake,
A word that makes the silence break,
A voice I knew I'd never hear,
But speaking soft and crystal-clear.

The Whistling Swans

FOR seasons I had waited for this thing,
The whistling swans to seek my marsh again—
When suddenly, out of darkness, wing to wing
I heard their wild white flutter swift and plain
Lighting upon the waters where stars were sleeping.
I pushed my door into the trembling night
And sought the marshes' edges, softly creeping
Like a slow secret in the pale moonlight.
Safe in the marsh they floated, spreading wide
Their wings like day unfolding in the sky,
And as I listened as near as I could hide,
I prayed some latening neighbor might happen by
To share that music, far too much for one
To listen to, deep in the night alone.

The Secret

THEY cannot know a secret that I know,
The city dwellers with their leaden eyes,
Caught like a leaf in traffic's ebb and flow,
Deafened by all a city's raucous cries;
They cannot know it in the canyons there
Where steel and stone deflect a mortal's stare.

For I arose before the moon went down,
Half-way toward morning. Dew-wet lay the world,
And, in the sunrise, brighter than the town.
Deep in the valley's hush I found uncurled
A bloodroot flower; I touched it with my hand,
And I alone know spring is on the land.

For a Battlefield

UNLESS your feet may tread as young winds tread
The aisles of sunrise, do not venture here;
There is a quietude death owes the dead,
A silence past the silence of a tear.
Let winter rainfall and the creep of moss
Write on each stone. They are the hands of Fame
That brood above a passionate battle's loss
And give to glad, gay youth less than a name.
Speak now no word. Let only Aprils stir
The grasses on forgotten battlefields
With helmets of bright gold and lavender—
The flash of splendor that a crocus yields.
Unless your feet may tread as winds at dawn,
O, do not tarry here . . . pass on, pass on!

Wanderer's Return

NOT the Aegean running cold with silver
Under the summer moon's bright spell,
The warm blue fingers of a Grecian wind
Striking wildflowers like a bell,

Not the pink clouds that almond trees lift up
To envious Italian skies,
Nor the swift waking of the slumberous Nile
Shaken by ibis and their cries—

Not these my eyes shall feast upon again.
I have come home; my flags are furled.
I am a captive in your heart's bright harbor
Whose shining waters bind my world.

Moment of Yellow Light

MELLOW now and trembling gold
The pears hang in the air
Like yellow notes the wind may strike
On any day as clear,

And on the ground their crumpled leaves
Lie one with earth again
To shape from dust another leaf,
A blossom washed by rain.

O autumn day I cry to you:
Must all this splendor pass
Less than a sigh across the hour,
A shadow on the grass—

Will no one come to share this light
Of pear and waning sun?
Autumn, spend gold more miserly
If I must watch alone!

The River Boats

WHERE are the old side-wheelers now,
The river boats of yesteryear—
The Comet and Vesuvius
Whose whistles sharp and clear
Routed a parish from its bed,
Shaking the morning air?

(Sing low, O voices from the past—
Breathe deep, O honeysuckle flower!)

Where is the shining Prince of Wales,
The Washington and Southern Belle,
The Sea Gull and the Unicorn
That made the Mississippi swell
In bright, swift tides against the wharves?
Where are they now? Who can tell?

(Play soft, O banjo from the shadows,
Bleed red, O melon on the vine!)

Where does the Annie Laurie rest,
The bold Diana's fabled hull,
The Sally Robinson trail her smoke?
Proud as a lady and beautiful

Casting her shadow in the sun,
Where steams the Belle Creole?

(Finger the willows gently, wind,
Spill all your silver, delta moon!)

Where are the boats of yesteryear?
It is a secret I cannot keep:
Deep in the harbor of a dream
They drift with tall majestic sweep,
The song of stevedores long silent,
And all their pilots fast asleep.

Child Watching a Snail

WITHIN the garden's close embrace, secure
As though it were a world for you alone,
I watch you ponder on the slow and sure
Pathway a lone snail journeys to a stone.
It takes an hour, you say, to pass a rose
Kindling its fire beside the walk; a day
To reach the gate a wind will never close;
Nothing can quicken its slow, unhurried way.
O child bewildered in the summer sun,
Too swiftly, all too swiftly, all things pass:
Bright stars at dusk, the evening's moon, half-blown,
Love, even love, like shadows on the grass.
Censure it not, this snail with silver glow;
Across your heart may Time move half as slow.

The Skier

HOW silently, and with a feather's grace
He takes the blinding slopes of glittering ice,

Now swift, now slow, now curving left or right
Over the reaches of a world turned white,

A sweep, a sigh, a surge of ecstasy,
Downward, and on, a heart set suddenly free,

Leaping and flowing, patterned like a rhyme,
A bird of air, a moment loosed from Time . . .

The Children in Autumn

THEY are unconcerned with autumn now, the children
Playing beneath this sudden blazing of the maples.
Autumn might just as well have come, for all they notice,
To the far Pacific's islands or the boulevards of Naples.

I hear them playing loudly under the reddening myrtles
The games they played when April captured the whitening
park;
Their signals are all the same and their laughing playmates
even,
But they do not see the embers of leaves that light the
gathering dark.

Autumn is fast upon us, but not for the eyes of the children.
It is for us, their elders, who carry its name in our talk,
Who sensed it before the turning of a maple leaf or the
sumac,
Before a scarlet cinder fell from the salvia's stalk.

The Return

IT WAS a fitting time to come back home.
Too long my feet had wandered, and the years
Like weeds had grown between us, shoulder-high.
I saw it from the hilltop, saw through tears
My long lost childhood in the apple boughs,
And greening underneath that stretch of sky
A willow I had planted beside the house.
Now I was turning home, and I had come
A long, long way through time, was back again
With all my heart had lost. The farm lay there
Waiting in sunlight for me. All was plain
Once more, and nothing lost, O nothing now!
I quickened my steps and suddenly, I declare,
Before I reached the quiet hilltop's brow
The apple trees came running half the way,
And as I met them shamefully face to face
They reached out blossoming boughs that sun-drenched day
And swung me up in their forgiving embrace.

Snow Hill at Sunset

AFTER the last swift flakes of snow had sighed
A casual frozen sigh and died away,
The sun broke through the clouds' last thawing tide
And smiled a little smile half gold, half gray,
Then shone again but for a moment only.
Then all was gray once more, until beyond
The hill a redder sun, far off and lonely,
Stared with a steady eye across the pond.

The wind awoke again and stalked around,
Stirring the snowfall where it tried to sleep,
Then suddenly across that stretch of ground
I saw more beauty than my eyes could keep—
A hill of snow the color of disaster
So red it reached along the frozen day,
As though a stand of deer had met its master
And in that scarlet moment was dragged away.

Hyacinths

YOU brought me hyacinths when there was no spring,
And snow lay like a white prayer on the world.
Warm blue they were, the color of seas that sing
Small broken songs where sunlit tides are curled
With all the passion of a lover's hands,
And I could read deep in your eyes of gray
The silent thundering love understands,
And all the shining words you could not say.
Others have brought me light within their eyes,
Others have lain their hands upon mine here,
But with your hyacinths there blossomed skies
Where no cloud was, and sunlight shimmered clear.
Pressed now within a book, these hyacinths hold
The love you brought me from the blinding cold.

Marsh Lilies

THERE are a thousand lilies in a pond
Beyond the marshes' edges, and beyond
There may be more where cypress dark and
Fashion a roof where slender herons sleep,
But I can only speak of what I know.
So, quietly with dusk's blue fall I go
Down to the marsh where lilies open wide
Showing the yellows of their hearts inside,
And in an hour's time, or maybe less,
My eyes have counted acres of loveliness
As though a snow had fallen in this land
Of scorching sun and cypresses and sand.

But there is one, no matter how I try,
I cannot pick beneath that stretch of sky,
A brighter one than any lily I know.
I reach for it and it is trembling so
Upon the waters I almost pull away,
Then reach again. It glitters bright as day,
But all the closer that I reach it seems
To blink, elusive as a thing in dreams.
Perhaps some night, but not a night too soon,
I'll bring back home that blossom of the moon.

So Small a Day

THE day my eyes found yours was not a day
To wear the glittering ink of history's pen.
It was a small day in the annals of men—
Bound east by daisies, west by pink and gray
Of clover blossoms under the wind's warm breath,
Yet, searching the farthest caverns of man's mind,
In all his written words I shall not find
Its shining counterpart this side of death.
So small a day, as Time's swift tidal flows,
Yet this I swear: no sun shall ever rise
To light the darkened lantern of the rose,
Nor fleet of clouds sail down the waking skies,
But for that love no history records
My tongue shall go impoverished for words.

Portrait in Sunlight

WITHIN her garden now she sits and suns,
Her life being over as surely as the last
Death rattle of the rusted Confederate guns.
Oblivious of time, or traffic past
Her boxwood hedge, she knits away the hours;
A robin twitters and with questioning eyes
Observes her from the pear tree's greening towers
That tremble with his casual melodies.
The village clock speaks with authority,
Dividing afternoon with impartial hands;
She does not hear; nor notice a butterfly
Whose wings reflect the colors of her strands.
She knits, and suddenly smiles, as though a wind
Had stirred the secret lilacs of her mind.

Orchard in Autumn

THE thieving wind has stolen all that summer
Bequeathed to autumn: leaves that turned to fire
Under the frost's white whip; the sumac's glimmer,
The measured music of the crickets' choir.

The empty boughs that knew a glory once,
Like wrinkled hands of old and lonely men
Reach toward the waning sun for sustenance;
Overhead the southing sparrows speed like rain.

The weight of Time hangs heavy on the hour
Where no wind stirs, and in the dark no light
Kindles the memory save one gold pear,
A ghostly lantern in the frosty night.



Winter Night

ONLY the young will brave the snow
And catch the flakes and watch them go
In swirling patterns up and down
The length and breadth of all the town.
Only the young can laugh to see
White, sudden blossoms on a tree
That were not there an hour ago,
Or lift their hearts to see the snow
Reach out its hand and turn the night
Into a wonderland of white.

The old will rise and turn the lock
When frozen fists of snowflakes knock
Upon the pane, along the sill,
And break the pine trees on the hill.
The old will draw the curtains tight
And have no traffic with the night;
But they will stir the fire and pile
The hearth with logs, and afterwhile,
When they are nodding in its glow,
Live once again lost years of snow.

How Like the Wind

HOW like the wind, the seeds of love in man.
Though mountains crack and tumble to the sea
And all the earth, in war's finality,
Burns in one swift horizon for Time to scan,
Through the dark hole where Everest leaves the sky,
Over the valleys where stood the Apennines,
A lonely seed of roses or of pines
Will catch in the wind's fingers moving by,
And so be carried like a trinket there,
Clasped from the thieves of lightning and of rain
Until some secret hour when there shall rise
Out of the sea some continent strange and bare,
And on its shores that lift in bright surprise,
Roses or pines, like love, shall blossom again.

Street Scene

DEEP in a city's crowded street
With sunlight in the air,
I saw an armored car go by.
I saw it stop, and there
Before a building's mighty door,
As if by magic wand,
I counted six or seven men
With satchels in their hand
And pistols at the belts they wore.
O, what is this? I said,
And asked again, until at last
A stranger turned his head:
"They're guarding a million dollars;
There's nothing safe," he said.

Suddenly turning in my tracks
I ran a block or two;
I caught my breath, then ran again
The way that wild deer do
Until I caught a ride from town,
And luck was with me there—
The man was going past my door,
And daylight still was clear.

And safe I was and in full time
To guard a fence at home
Where all my yellow roses
Were just about to bloom.

Autumn Pastoral

LIKE old men smacking dry lips over cider
The leaves are tasting autumn in the air,
And in low valleys where the hills stretch wider
The smell of woodsmoke spirals slow and clear.
Thin orchards yawn into the wind, their fruit
Spent swiftly as the years have dropped away,
And in the dangling silence a lone bee's lute
Stitches a yellow seam across the day.
Where sumac ripens redder in the sun
And goldenrod drifts pale, reluctant dust,
Two lovers rise and walk the fields as one,
Pledging eternal love with eager eyes,
Blind to the swift year turning now to rust,
The wild geese thundering south through blackening skies.

Georgia Towns

DEEP in the Georgia night when all
The crickets have hushed their notes
And silence lies upon the needles
Of pines and on the feathered throats
Of sparrows in the star-still boughs,
Across the meadows of my mind
There drift the names of Georgia towns
Softly and slowly as summer wind.

O little half-hid towns I love!
I hear them waking, and in sleep,
And all the music of their names
Like opening flowers, a tidal sweep,
Rests on my heart the hand of peace.
O little towns how close you lie
Upon the warm red clay, how near
Your sun-drenched rooftops touch the sky!
Not all the violins in the world,
The flutes, nor ivory keys,
Could take me so triumphantly
And give my soul release.

O Dewy Rose and Talking Rock,
O rain-wet Rising Fawn,
Social Circle where the hand
Of friendship greets the dawn,
O Cave Spring cool as lilies are,
Ty Ty, Ringgold, Summerville
Where honeysuckle haunts the air
When dusk falls blue and chill—
O Blue Ridge resting like a cloud,
Benevolence and Kennesaw,
Hiwassee, Lovelace, Darien
Where four-o'clocks are law,
O Daisytown and Shadydale,
Across my heart you go
With all a June day's fiery breath,
The grace of winter's snow.

Deep in my last dark Georgia night
When I have come to rest,
Am one again with her red clay hills,
May all the names I love the best
Drift back, in music, over me,
May each come ringing like a rhyme
For one who loves each door, each lane,
An old man lost in sleep and Time.

The Blowing of Leaves

THE blowing of leaves is in my heart tonight,
The sound of all Novembers I have known.
Across remembered skies like comets' light
They flare and die. Before the fire, alone,

I watch the logs give up each smoldering jewel;
Slowly one by one, like years, they fall away
To nothingness where ashes cold and cruel
Anonymize the fires they were today.

Beyond my windowsill the new leaves fall,
Leaves of an autumn far too new to know;
I shall not traffic with them, hear their call,
Nor turn to watch the first swift flake of snow.

Kindle the fire again! Let it leap bright!
Back to your wine I tell myself, proud host
To all the autumns out of Time tonight—
Swing wide the door, let in each straggling ghost!

Sunset: Marsh Country

OVER the marsh the wild birds go,
White herons, blue mallards, the dark jackdaws;
Singeing the west, the sun burns low.
Now the swift-running tide withdraws,
Pulling the grasses, shadow-stirred.
Deep in the marsh slow fireflies light
As silence like a stricken bird
Circles and plunges through the night.

Taormina, Revisited

NEVER come back, you said, to these wild slopes
Where the slow wind spends all the almonds' flowers,
And a lone shepherd, climbing wearily, gropes
From ledge to ledge, the sheep bells chiming like hours
Aging the village below us. Never come back,
O never, you said. But I return today,
Hearing remembered breakers leap and crack,
Drowning the silence with the thunder of spray.
Nothing has changed. It is only you and I.
Peace rides the cobbled streets; the almond pours
Its sun-hot petals beneath the quiet sky—
But eyes of lovers carry the light of yours,
Their lips your laughter, the songs that we have sung
A drift of Time away, when we were young.



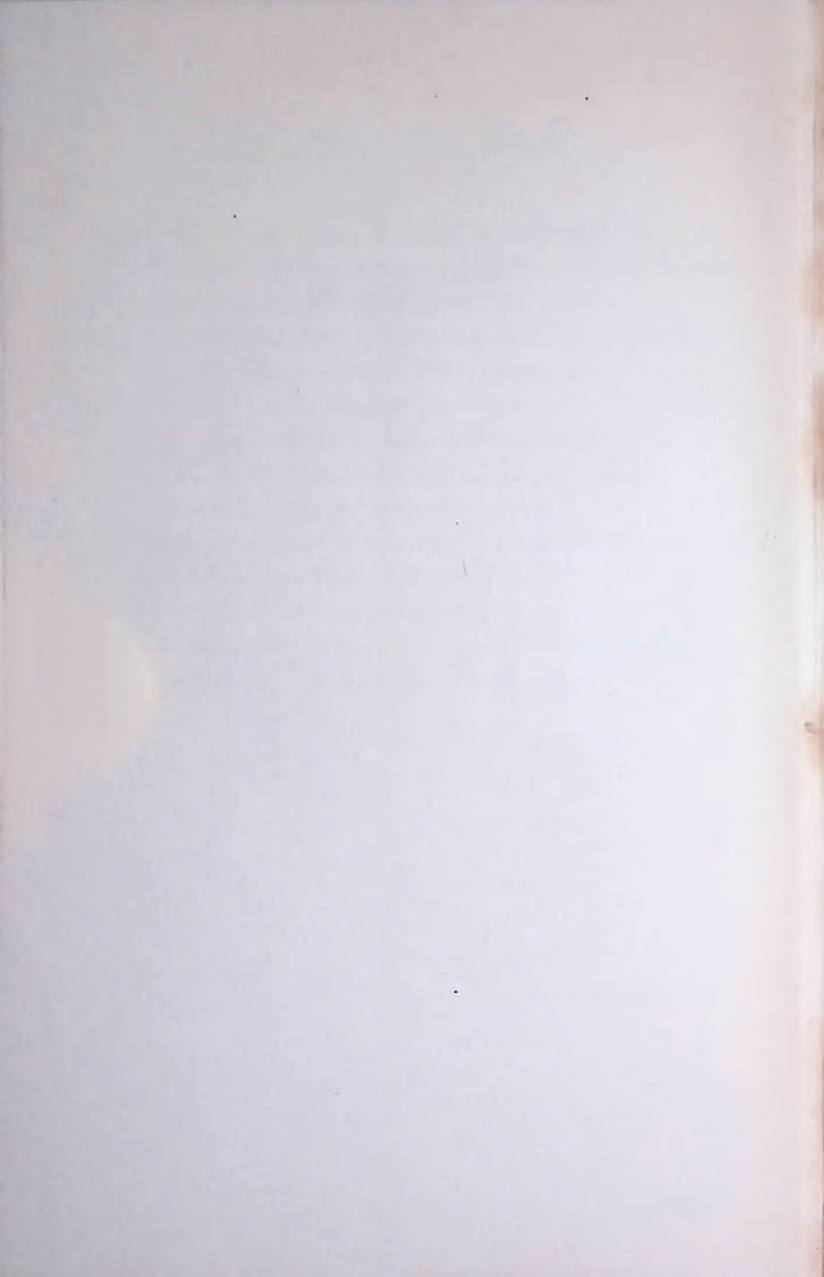
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DANIEL WHITEHEAD HICKY

A NATIVE of the state of Georgia, Mr. Hicky was educated in private schools at Memphis, Tennessee, and Charlotte, North Carolina. He has spent a great deal of time in foreign travel, having visited and gathered material in Europe, Egypt, the Holy Land, Africa, South America, and the West Indies. He left the cotton business in 1934 to devote his time to writing. During World War II he served with the United States Air Forces.

Winner of the first prize of the Poetry Society of America, Mr. Hicky has published his poetry in all the leading periodicals. NEVER THE NIGHTINGALE is his fifth published volume.

